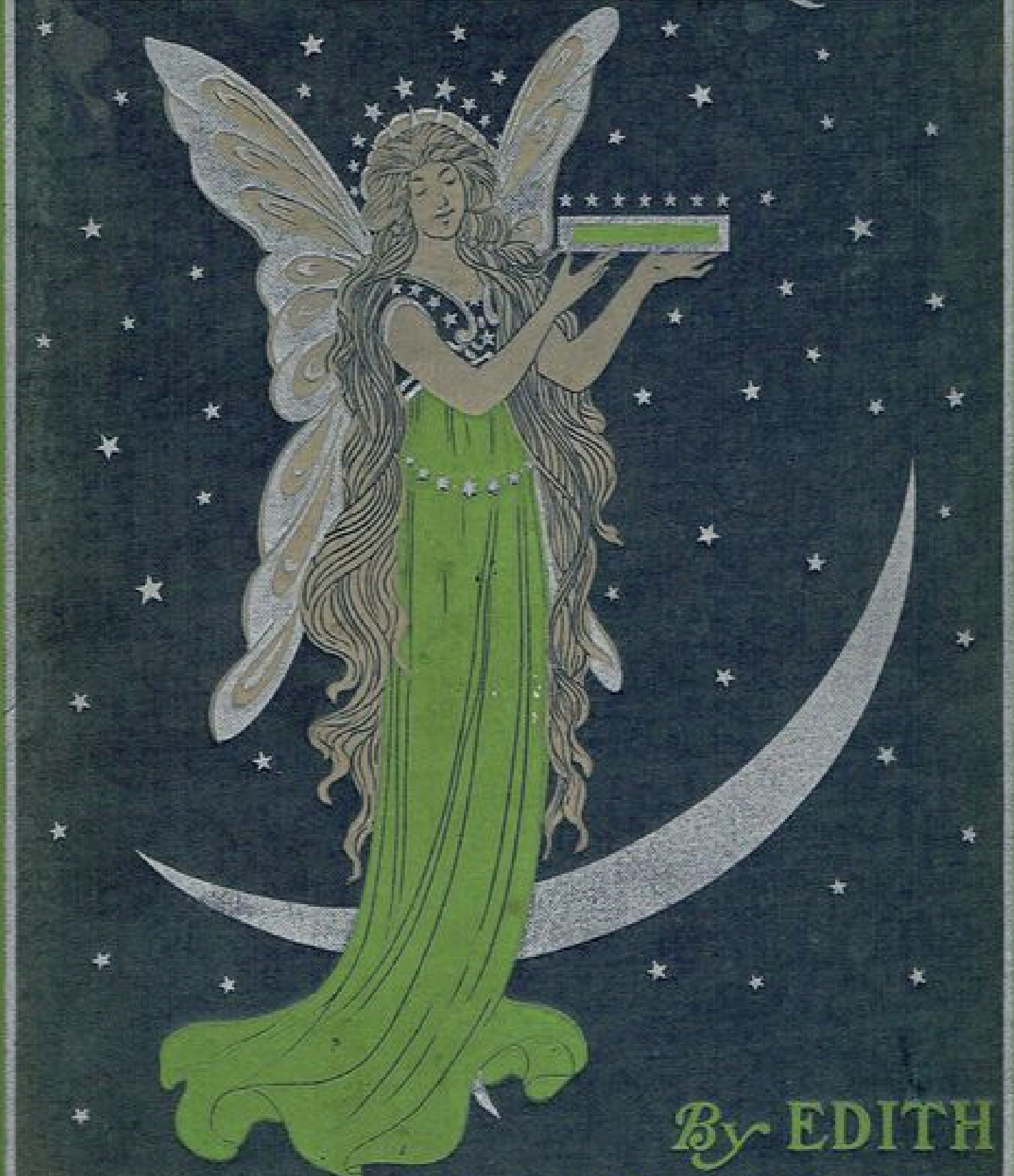
THE STAR FAIRIES



By EDITH OGDEN HARRISON

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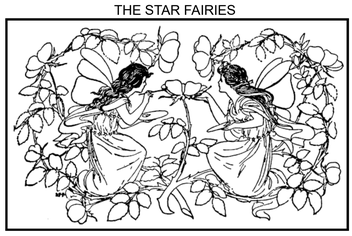
THE STAR FAIRIES



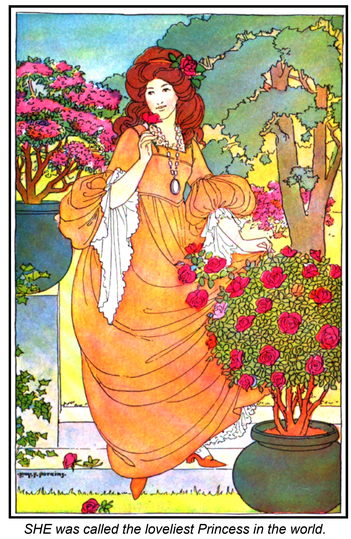
THE star fairies live in those jewelled homes we see twinkling in the sky every night, shining out like diamonds. No mortal could dwell in them, for their blaze of light is so dazzling it would blind and kill us at once. But the earth is so far away that simply their sparkle reaches us, and does not even frighten us but only makes us wonder at their great beauty.

The star fairies are very busy, for they have many things to do to help make all the pretty things there are in our own world. They mix the bright colors and paint all the beautiful flowers around us. The lovely pink roses you see would never be so beautiful if they were painted by mortal hand. Think of all the work there must be in painting even one flower, and then think of all the flowers in the world. It must keep thousands of fairies busy all the time. And how hard it must be to choose the colors — yellow for the buttercups, blue for the violets, purple for the pansies. Do you think any mortal could ever get the perfect tints the fairies do I When they selected green for the trees and the grass they picked out the very nicest color that could be thought of to make the forests and fields so cool and pleasant. They also paint the stripes in the rainbow, and they love that work, for those delicate colors are their especial delight. And they also stain the sky that rich deep blue we see in the big ceiling overhead.

But besides all these duties, they have another much more important than any I have yet told you about, and compared to it the painting of the flowers and the grass and the rainbow and the sky seems a very small duty indeed. Their real work is the care of the little children in the world. As soon as a child is born it is given a star fairy to guide and to watch over it through life, and a new star is hung up in the sky to show how pleased the queen of the star fairies is to welcome it. Do you know the easiest way to learn the number of children born into the world? Choose some fine clear night and then count the stars overhead. If you succeed in doing this, you will easily learn the exact number of little ones in the world.

Well, once upon a time in a beautiful kingdom upon the earth there dwelt a king and a queen who had one lovely girl baby. She grew up to be a beautiful young maiden, and her hair was as black as night, while her skin was as white as milk. Her cheeks were pink as the lining of a seashell, and her lips were like cherries. She was called the loveliest princess in the world. Now a young prince in the fairy star realm had been given charge of this girl baby when she was born, and as she grew up he had carefully guarded and protected her. As he watched her become daily more beautiful, it is not to be wondered at that when she was grown to be a young woman he had fallen in love with her.

But every one knows a fairy cannot wed a mortal, at any rate our fairy had never before heard of such a thing. His heart beat jealously at the thought of his earthly sweetheart marrying any one besides himself; and as she had many suitors he feared each day might bring a welcome lover. Once in the long ago a fairy had loved an earth maiden, but his love had only brought unhappiness, for in showing himself to her he had been accompanied by such dazzling flames of golden light that no mortal could stand it, and the maiden had died, overcome by the brilliancy of her fairy lover.



SHE was called the loveliest Princess in the world.

Now the star fairy loved this maiden too much to risk her life by appearing before her in fairy form, so he opened his sparkling wings and flew back to the starry realm to tell his queen of his unhappy state of mind. Perhaps she would in her wisdom be able to suggest a way. With his long graceful wings he soon reached the star palaces, and found the fairy queen and her court. They were busily engaged mixing the colors for a lovely rainbow they intended to paint in the sky the next day.

The queen was holding the precious caskets which contained the delicate colors. Those soft tints in the sky cannot be imitated, and even the star fairies regard them as very precious. They are easily lost, and for safe keeping they are carefully stored in the palace treasury, and only the queen is allowed to take them out. Each color is incased in a costly box made of gold or silver or precious wood, all inlaid with glittering diamonds and rubies, and these boxes are kept in a large room with lofty ceilings.

The fairies held their breath while the queen passed with her precious treasures. Then, with jewelled brushes, they carefully and tenderly dipped out the dainty colors they wished to use. The young prince waited until the sacred ceremony was over and the treasures had again been safely locked in the star palace. Then bowing his head to Her Majesty he told his love story, how the dainty little earth maiden was more to him than any of his race, how for one tender look of her beautiful eyes he would be willing to die, and how he could no longer exist without her.

The queen and her court listened sadly to his story, and the queen entreated him to try to forget his love for the earth maiden and remain with them in the star world. Mortals were not meant to wed with fairies, she said, and the marriage even if it could occur would bring only unhappiness. But the star prince's heart was bound up in the brown-eyed princess of the earth, her silken tresses were more to him than all the jewels of fairyland, and he would not listen.

At last the queen sadly admitted there was a way for him to marry his earth maiden. She had the power to make him a mortal, but only for a short while, and for every year of happiness spent upon the earth as a mortal, he must serve in fairyland one hundred years of bondage. Ten years meant one thousand of bondage, and twenty years of earthly joy was the most she had the power to grant.

The fairy prince turned pale when he heard the great test his love would be given, but he never hesitated, and bravely answered.

"Give me but the earth maiden for my bride," he said, "and for that happiness I am willing to suffer anything. But whatever form my penalty takes, O Queen, grant me my last request as a star fairy. In serving these long, long years of bondage leave me still my wings! Do not take away from me those signs of my royal blood, and when I am again changed from a mortal to my fairy form restore to me at least my wings."

The queen granted the request, and then giving him her hand to kiss, she told him he could come upon the earth and reign as king for twenty years.

Full of joy he thanked her and prepared to return at once to the earth. Thousands of star fairies determined to go with him, and give him a brilliant journey. Sailing through the sky, their thousands of flashing wings made a wonderful glow in the heavens, and then appeared for the first time those strange Northern Lights, which the wise men have so often since talked about and wondered over. For, as they flew, their long shining skirts trailed behind them, and floating mysteriously through the sky, great streamers of light were seen. Sometimes they shot up in a pure white and silver light, then they changed to a pale pink or orange, then died away to a delicate green. It was the flowing garments of the fairies, long and cloud-like, and their brilliant jewels and necklaces with their golden wands that lit up the heavens. They were doing honor and bidding good-bye to their beloved brother.

The queen had given the star fairy the form of a very handsome young man and she had provided a rich and powerful kingdom for him to rule over, so that he had no trouble in meeting his earth maiden and declaring his love for her. When the father of the maiden saw a powerful and wealthy young king come to woo his daughter, he did not object to the marriage, and as for the princess, when she heard the handsome young man say how much he loved her, she quickly fell in love with him.

So the marriage was celebrated with great splendor, and the Northern Lights again appeared in the heavens. The young king and his beautiful queen lived most happily and ruled their kingdom most wisely for many years. The star fairy was happier than he ever dreamed of being, for he found his earth maiden more precious to him every day.

In spite of all his happiness, however, the fairy suffered pain in the thought that each day brought him closer to separation from those he loved so dearly. The time must come, sooner or later, when he would have to leave his wife and children, and return to the star land, and the pain in his heart grew with each year that passed. At last the twenty years had nearly gone, and as his wife had noticed for a long time his increasing sadness she decided to ask him the cause. Of late, too, those wonderful shifting curtains of light in the North had appeared more often and more brightly, and after each of these appearances, her husband had seemed more unhappy. What could it mean?

One evening while they sat together watching those beautiful signals she questioned him, and he opened his heart and told her his secret, concealing nothing from her. She was of course very much surprised to learn he was a star fairy, but her only thought was how dreadful it would be to have to lose him, for she loved him dearly, and she begged him to persuade his fairy queen to let them be together in his exile. He kissed her tenderly and promised to do as she wished, and the days went by, and at last his summons came.

It was a clear and lovely evening. A slim crescent of the moon hung over the earth and the heavens were studded with the jewelled homes of the fairies. Never had they shone so brilliantly. They looked like fire, and their long rays darting down glowed like streams of light on the water. The star fairy and his wife sat together watching the night, and it seemed to them they heard soft music, but it was only the beating of the waves on the white sand.

At last in the far distance they saw a faint light shimmer and fade away again. The queen crept closer to her husband's arms, for she knew the light was the fluttering wing of a star fairy. Perhaps it was a signal. Stronger and nearer came the lights, and presently they saw amid all this splendor of opal and red and silver the fairy queen herself. Her gown was silver and gold, and on her forehead glittered one beautiful flashing star. She had softened her brilliancy a little to suit mortal eyes, and she was seated in a lovely rose upheld by butterflies.

"The desire of your heart shall be granted, unselfish soul," she said to the queen, "and if you have the courage to share your husband's days of bondage your love will give him an immortal soul. A mortal can never become a star fairy, but it is possible by some great sacrifice on the part of a mortal to provide a star fairy with a soul. But for two thousand years you must both wander upon the earth in the form I shall provide. After that, if your courage does not fail, you will again have your beautiful bodies and live together with immortal souls in a star palace of your own choosing."

Thus saying, the fairy queen was slowly borne away in her rose car by the butterflies, and in a few moments she had disappeared in the fleecy clouds. Looking down, the king and queen discovered that they had already assumed their new forms, for they were two beautiful snow-white birds.

Thus had the queen kept her promise to the star prince, and restored his wings, and thus the beautiful birds appeared for the first time upon the earth. Since then they have increased and multiplied, and now they fill the woods with life and music. If you go to-day into those shaded woods where crystal streams flow over rocks and moss, and where flowers and ferns form a soft carpet for your feet, you will find the birds in every variety of color. Many of them wear the rainbow-tinted dresses of their fairy cousins in the stars. In these beautiful forests, if you sit and listen to the songs the birds sing they will tell you the reason they exist —a great and boundless love.

Click the book image to turn to the next Chapter.

THE GIFT OF THE BIRDS;
OR, THE TREASURE OF THE SOUTH

DOWN at the plantation house where the broad galleries were supported by large red brick pillars, the green window-shutters of a front room on the second floor were flung wide open, for in the room lay a little girl getting well. She was only six years old and she had been very ill; but now the gloomy days had passed, and, except that she was as white as the big magnolia-blossoms on the trees, she was beginning to be herself again.

"Sunshine is all she needs," said the doctor; "let her live in the open air."

So one day propped up with pillows, she lay on the balcony in a large chair. She could see the long row of umbrella china-trees on either side of the pebbled walk leading down to the front gate; and the handsome hedges of acacias, with their tiny yellow blossoms filling the air with fragrance, which lined the fences everywhere. Off in a corner of the yard clustered a dozen or more pecan trees, and now and then the sharp chatter of the squirrels reached her as they stole the nuts and scampered away to hide them. The lawn, soft and green, sloped down to the white oyster-shell road, and a mile away, shimmering in the distance, the broad bayou ran curling around the marsh, smiling in brilliant sparkles under the blue sky.

Little Zeline lay happy and contented just to be out of the house again, and able to enjoy such beautiful things. Presently a red-throated, brilliant-colored lizard ran across her chair, then, frightened at what it had done, darted along the rail of the baluster until it reached a safe distance from the child. There the excited little creature stopped, and turning its head gazed steadily back with its tiny bright eyes at Zeline. It was about eight inches long, and its tail, which it kept wriggling all the time, had black markings on it, while its body changed its colors from brown to green in various shades every few minutes. Zeline lay very quiet watching it, and finally, losing its fear of her, the beautiful little creature came closer, and at last ran across her hand.

Day by day the lizard returned to watch Zeline among her pillows, but it would dart away swiftly at the least movement of the child or any sudden noise in the house. Zeline was fascinated with her new pet and could talk of nothing else. It helped her to pass away the time, and it became so tame that it ate from her hand. One warm, balmy day, as the little girl was watching it blink its eyes and change its colors, she said:

"Oh, you wise-eyed lizard, if you could only talk to me!"

"But I can," promptly replied the lizard.

"Good gracious!" said the little girl, "can you really talk?"

"Certainly," the lizard replied. "I came especially to talk to you, but you never gave me a chance."

"What do you mean by a chance?" asked Zeline. "I was very quiet at first for fear of frightening you; why couldn't you talk then?"

"Because," replied the lizard, "some one must always ask us a question before we can answer."

"Dear me," gasped Zeline, "tell me, then, where do you live and what do you do?"

So the lizard told her he had many homes: one was in the pretty trees, where, when he ran up the sides, he looked like the brown bark; and another was in the tall grass, where, gliding through, all his hues seemed wonderful shades of green.

"Do you know any stories?" asked the child.

"Oh, yes," the lizard said, "I know many, but I came especially to tell you one."

"How nice of you," Zeline murmured, and seated herself back comfortably among her pillows to listen; "please begin."

"Well," began the lizard, blinking his eyes and darting out his long tongue to snap a passing fly, "many years ago, in a charming spot out in the woods, a most exquisite baby nymph was found by the birds of the forest. It had been apparently deserted by its parents, and was lying alone, covered up with brown leaves, but it was not afraid and was cooing with delight when discovered. As there was no one to claim it, the birds decided to adopt it for their own.

"The little thing soon grew up to be a lovely child, and became the delight of her adopted parents. They built her a beautiful home of jasmine hedges and covered it with leaves. They taught her to sing exquisite melodies, and she lived a gay, light-hearted creature. Her food was the delicious berries she found in the forest, and her drink the crystal streams that bubbled through them. All day she roamed the woods, but there was not an animal or a creature in the broad forest that did not love the pretty nymph child Nerida, so she went and came unharmed.

"Free to enjoy herself as she pleased, there was only one thing she was forbidden to do: she could never enter the marsh nor tread its enticing-looking ground. For its soft green grass and its attractive flowers concealed dreadful terrors. An old witch lived there with an ugly alligator for her son, and this horrible son demanded human beings for his food. The birds feared that Nerida's beauty might make him want to devour her also.

"The witch adored her ugly son, and near the lagoon in which he lived she had made her dwelling. This she did by turning the land into a marsh; that is, she filled the ground with reeds and rushes and soft grass, making it look like land, and then soaked it through and through with water, so that the beautiful earth one saw was really not earth at all, but only a deadly quagmire.

"If one stepped out of the little pirogue or canoe floating on the bayou and tried to gather the beautiful tiger-lilies or purple passion-flowers that grew everywhere about, he was never seen again. The moment he put his foot on the marsh he sank rapidly to his knees, and in spite of all his efforts to save himself, was drawn down lower and lower into the mud. The old witch had him in her clutches and would never release him. Only his little pirogue was left floating down the bayou to tell his sad fate.

"Every one, therefore, was warned against the deadly dangers of the marsh-lands. The birds could venture there because their wings protected them, and if they stopped to drink or rest, they flew lightly away again unhurt. The witch hated them because they were beautiful and innocent, but she had no power over them, she could harm nothing that could fly. So also with the butterflies who came to sip the sweetness from the flowers.

"Years went by and the wood nymph had grown into a charming maiden. Her long hair fell to her knees, and her bright eyes sparkled like dew-drops. Her pretty teeth gleamed between her red lips when she laughed, and she laughed long and merrily because everything was bright and beautiful in the woods. The birds were anxious, however, to see her well married, and in their long journey northward they looked eagerly for a suitable husband. But Nerida was not in a hurry, for she loved her foster parents and her companions in the wood. She loved the squirrels, and the red-throated lizards were her delight, but she loved her liberty best of all, and she would sit for hours on the banks of the sunny bayou twining leaves in her hair and singing her pretty songs.

"One day a river god was swimming in the river, and hearing the singing he stopped to listen. He thought he had never seen anything more beautiful than Nerida, or heard more bewitching music than her songs. So day after day he returned to see and talk to her, and when the birds returned from their long pilgrimage they found Nerida deeply in love with the handsome stranger.

"When they found their beloved adopted daughter was so happy, the birds gladly gave their consent to the marriage, and wedding preparations were at once begun. The birds desired Nerida to weave her own wedding-veil, and they told her of a wonderful material they had seen in the East. So away they flew to the land of Araby, promising to return soon with the softest and lightest stuff in the world to weave for the bridal finery.

"The wood nymph and her lover were happy and contented, and were quite willing to await the birds' return. Nerida always met her lover on the banks of the bayou, and there, singing and twining garlands of leaves, they passed many happy hours together.

"One beautiful warm afternoon, as some lovely clouds were floating lazily across the blue sky, she ran down to meet him. Not a breath was stirring, for the day was soft and mild, and the unruffled waters of the bayou reflected long yellow beams, and golden lights quivered far down in their shining depths. Suddenly a school of tiny fish jumped up, showing their bright colors and markings of green, while the water fell from them in glittering showers, but save for this sudden disturbance everything around was perfectly quiet.

"The little maid was too early for the meeting hour, so she sat and amused herself watching all the beautiful things about her. How lovely the marsh was, with its tints softened by a tender haze and its reeds and rushes scarcely moving! There was a dreamy stillness everywhere, and the flowers were never more tempting.

"A big star-eyed passion-flower growing close along the border of the stream was most enticing. It grew so near, Nerida thought that once across the bayou she could pick it without an effort. And surely that was not marsh ground it grew upon, for the grass looked firm and strong beneath it. The great purple flower with its delicate, white-crowned centre smiled across at her bewitchingly. How lovely it would look in her hair when she greeted her lover!

"Another moment and the imprudent little nymph had plunged boldly into the water and crossed the stream. Soon she stood upon the spot, and the splendid flower was already in her hand, when suddenly, without warning, the ground gave way beneath her feet. In an instant she realized her peril, and screamed aloud in fear. Alas! it was too late, for in spite of her frantic effort to release herself she slowly sank into the old marsh witch's outstretched arms.

"Her cries had reached her lover's ears, however, and he hastened to her assistance; but it was useless, for at his first step upon her land 'the old witch quickly changed him into a weeping willow on the banks of the bayou.

"The poor little wood nymph was now entirely in the witch's power, and she felt she was surely doomed to be eaten by the ugly old alligator. But she was so beautiful that when the alligator saw her he decided to marry her instead. Although Nerida was horrified at the decision, the old witch was delighted to have a wood nymph for a daughter-in-law, and she readily agreed to the wishes of her son, and preparations for the wedding were begun. The only thing that gave Nerida any hope was that a wood nymph could not be married without her own free consent. But the witch had little fear of Nerida's refusing long, and was quite sure she would soon consent to become the alligator's bride. So she placed her in a prison built of reeds and rushes and lined with yellow tiger-lily leaves. The door was guarded by two big water snakes, and a lot of ugly frogs with pop-eyes hopped around and peered at her, keeping up a continuous croaking.

"The frogs were watching Nerida to see that she did not attempt to escape, for the witch was determined to keep her in prison until she consented to wed her son the alligator. But the wood nymph hated him and his big white cruel teeth, for she remembered how the little children at the plantation house had amused themselves by imitating a baby's cry or a little dog's bark, and how at either sound the alligators would all stick their heads out of the lagoon with hungry eyes and open mouths, hoping that a baby or a nice fat dog would tumble into the stream for them to eat. So Nerida, knowing how cruel he was, determined never to give her consent to the marriage.

"Now as soon as the wild animals of the wood heard of their little friend's misfortune they all got together and held a council of war, and discussed how best they could rescue her. The raccoon was the only animal that had ever ventured into the marsh and returned unharmed. He was very sly, and somehow the old witch had let him entirely alone; but none of the other animals had dared to enter her grounds. A big wild-cat, crouching low on the limb of a tree, said he believed if he took a large army of cats and stepped very lightly (as cats always do), he would be able to cross the marsh without sinking. They could then tear down the prison house of rushes and reeds with their sharp claws and rescue Nerida without trouble. The wild-cat's plan seemed a good one to the animals, and they consented to the undertaking. So a large army of cats was formed, and one night by the light of the moon they crept stealthily across the marsh. They went very rapidly and safely at first, and it really looked as if they would be successful. But when they had almost reached the middle of the marsh, suddenly the wicked old witch, who had been secretly laughing at them all the time, threw them all, head downwards, into the quagmire, leaving only their big bushy brown tails sticking out as a warning to the other animals. These cat-tails still grow brown and bushy wherever you can find a marsh, and from that day to this all cats are afraid of water.

"Well, after this adventure it certainly seemed hopeless to try to rescue the maiden, but her friends were far from despairing. Some of them started off on a long journey to consult the king of the forest, the roaring lion, while others went down to the gulf to get the Sea Sing to send an army to their assistance.

"Now all this time the poor birds had been flying about almost distracted with grief at the fate of their beloved daughter. They hovered over the marsh in the hopes of seeing her again, and tried to think of plans to help her. They knew that the witch and her son were more afraid of dry earth than anything in the world, for to be without water meant death to them, and they could not be happy without the oozy black slime. Therefore the birds proposed to drink up all the water in the marsh, and thus drain it perfectly dry. Of course that would take a long time, but if they were faithful in their efforts they would win in the end. So they went to work at once, and no matter at what hour one looked at the marsh after that, the faithful, patient little birds could be seen drinking all the water they could hold.

"Now when I saw the birds undertaking such a terribly long task as drinking up all the water in the marsh, I felt Nerida would surely be discouraged in waiting for them to finish the work, and might, in her despair, consent to wed the alligator. Then it was I remembered you lying here on the gallery in front of the big house, in the midst of the warm sunshine and breathing the sweet perfume of the acacias, and I suddenly darted away like lightning to find you. And here I am," added the lizard, "will you help us?"

"But how can I?" asked Zeline, big-eyed and wondering.

"Easily! Ask your father to drain the marsh, and that will drive the old witch away. She cannot live without water, and then we can rescue Nerida and her handsome lover, and we shall all be happy again. You must hurry, though," he continued, "for if you will watch to-night you will see how much in earnest the old witch is that her ugly son's marriage to our little Nerida shall soon take place. She lights her lamps early, and she keeps her frog slaves working all night preparing for the wedding feast."

So that evening Zeline begged her father to drain the marsh, and he, amused at her anxiety, told her she was a most wise little girl, for he had been thinking of doing just that thing for many a day. Then she showed him through the window the mysterious lights, flitting back and forth through a pearly mist lying low over the reeds and rushes; for every night the witch spread this white veil over her possessions, as soon as the sun went down, and lit her lamps that she might work unmolested. Queer little balloon-like shapes arose from the damp ground, mounted higher and higher, and then floated rapidly away. Her father called it *"feu follet"* or "Will-o'-the-wisp," and said that all sea marshes had it; but Zeline shook her head slowly, for she believed her wise-eyed lizard knew better.

Time went swiftly by. The big ditches and canals were rapidly being cut, and eagerly did Zeline watch the labor. The roses were again blooming in her cheeks, but she loved her lizard friend as she had loved him in those long and tedious days when he first came to see her lying white and weak among her pillows.

At last the marsh was entirely drained, and the broad bayou ran shining through the great acres of rich land. Then the river god, restored to his natural form, killed the two snakes and released his beautiful bride. Happy-hearted and gay, the little green lizard described to Zeline the wedding festivities. All the trees had been lighted with glow worms until the forest looked like an enchanted world. The flowers bloomed their brightest and put on their gayest colors. The bees brought honey for the feast, and an orchestra of mocking-birds sang the wedding march, while all the inhabitants of the woods offered marriage gifts to the bride and groom.

NERIDA had never been lovelier than in her bridal robes.

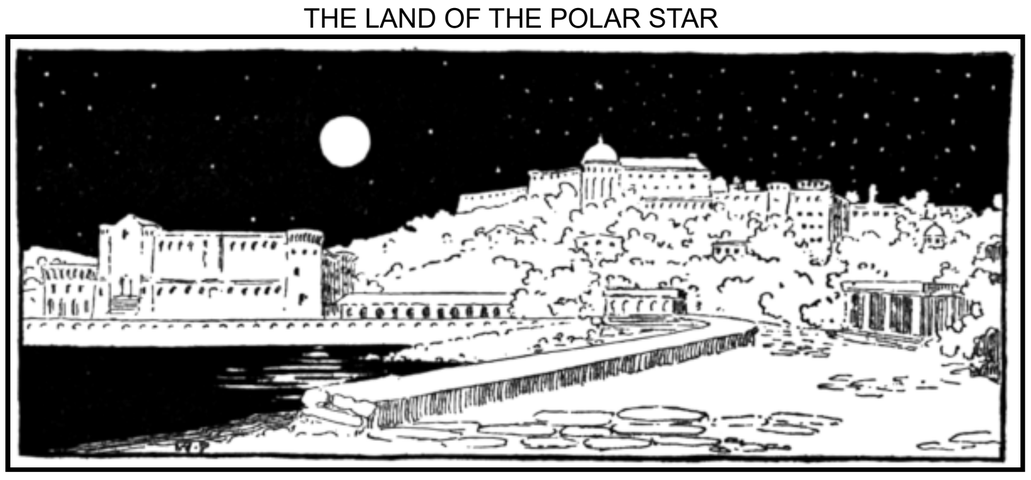
Nerida had never been lovelier than in her bridal robes. A beautiful dress made from the softest thistle-down enveloped her form. She wore magnificent pearls which her lover brought her from the blue depths of the gulf, but on her head she put only a crown of green leaves, for the soft material which the birds had brought from Araby for the wedding veil, she gave in her gratitude to Zeline, who had. done so much for her happiness.

The witch's power was utterly destroyed, and she was compelled, in punishment for the evil she had done and the many lives she had sacrificed, to weave an endless shroud and hang it upon the trees. That shroud is the beautiful gray moss you see hanging in graceful drapery from the live oaks. The alligator was left in the lagoon, but was forbidden ever to enter the salt waters of the gulf again. He was to be hated for his cruelty by all good fishes, and must avoid their haunts forever under pain of death.

Then the faithful, happy birds made their present to Zeline. Each one drew from its breast a single bit of purest white down hidden among its feathers, and planted it in the rich black soil of the old marsh. In a week, under the warm southern sun, there bloomed a wonderfully beautiful flower. It was white the first day, bright red the second; on the third all the leaves fell away leaving a tiny ball, in which lay the gift. The ball was a deep brown, almost black, but it held in its heart the softest, fluffiest, whitest thing on earth, and the name of that wonderfully beautiful stuff was cotton.

This royal gift to little Zeline from the birds was worth more than jewels, because it gave employment to thousands of people, and it brought gold and silver into her country and made the land of sunshine and magnolias very famous. To this day the South loves to know that to the kind heart of a little girl it owes the source of its greatest wealth and riches.

THE LAND OF THE POLAR STAR



UNDER a marvellous sky, blue as a turquoise, out of which poured the warm golden sunshine, once upon a time there lay a great ocean. Sometimes this ocean was like a mirror, reflecting the sky above it, and again it washed in gentle waves the shores of a beautiful country.

In this wonderful land the days were very long, lasting for months, and when the nights came they were equally long, and even more beautiful than the days. Everything there enchanted the eye. The flowers, the grass, the fruits were all lovelier and finer and more delicious than in any other spot in the world. And in the midst of this wonderful land a king and a queen reigned over a charming people.

Now the King of the fairies often visited these people, for at that time, so many, many years ago, the fairies and the mortals mixed together; and one day the fairy King, to show his great affection for them, decided to give these people a magnificent present. So he selected the very handsomest jewel in his crown, which was so superb that all the diamonds and pearls and rubies in the world put together could not equal it in value, and presented it to them. Its lustre and brilliancy were so great that it shone out over the whole world, and even the poorest could see its light and enjoy it. The fairy King impressed upon the King and Queen of the mortals that they must value it above all their possessions, and that no earthly hand must ever touch it. He would place it upon the roof of one of their palaces, and there it should stand as a guiding star for all the world. For it should be so placed that its reflection in the sky above would be exactly in the north, and its reflected light, like a brilliant little star, would shine directly over the palace treasury. The people of the earth were delighted with the magnificent gift, and promised faithfully to guard it carefully and never move it from the spot where the fairy. King should place it.

Now this city was filled with splendid palaces, built of solid gold and silver, and studded with many rare and precious stones. In the handsomest and costliest of all these buildings was placed the great treasure. All day long its jewelled rays shone out, so that no matter where the fairies might be, they had no difficulty in returning. But at night, when all its glowing light was thrown up into the sky, to guide the sailors and save them from shipwreck, they could not always tell the spot, for there were millions of stars in the heavens and they were all so much alike. Then the fairy King gave them a sure guide: one night, as darkness fell upon the earth, there crept up over the hills seven brilliant little stars all a-glitter with fire and silver, and two of them pointed toward another tiny sparkling one hanging exactly over the palace treasury. This star has ever since stood like a sentinel in the heavens, shedding its dazzling rays directly down upon the palace containing the priceless stone, and showing the way home to every little wandering fairy.

For a long time the people of the earth were faithful to the promise made to the fairy King and gloried in the possession of the jewel; and often they would spend hours upon the roof of the palace, delighting in the flashing gem. Among them sometimes came Queen Gertrude, who was a very beautiful woman. Her large brown eyes would linger lovingly upon the brilliant gem, and once when a saucy little handmaiden whispered, "How gloriously the jewel would shine in your sun-kissed locks," the Queen trembled with pleasure.

Alas! the little handmaiden had sown the seed of temptation, and the seed grew and grew in the heart of the Queen. At night she would let down her glorious auburn hair, which fell to her knee, and would twine her pearls and jewels in it, but each time she would say to herself, "None of my jewels are like the fairy's. If I could only wear his for one night!"

Day by day the desire grew stronger, until she could no longer resist it, and one night when every one was sleeping she stole the golden key from under her husband's pillow and slipped out of the palace alone. She soon reached the treasure house, and, unlocking it, crept softly up the stairs. Once upon the roof, she hesitated, it seemed such a dreadful thing to do; but one look at the shining gem, and the temptation was too great—she stretched out her hand and grasped it. But just as she lifted it, a terrible noise like thunder broke upon her, and the palace shook like a leaf. In her fright she dropped the jewel, and it rolled away upon the roof, and was no longer directly in the north. The terrible noise awakened the city, and in a few moments the streets were filled with people. In their midst appeared the fairy King, and at sight of him the frightened Queen clung to her husband for protection.

Stern and angry, the fairy King spoke: "See how you have valued the mark of my especial favor! This jewel is contentment but never again shall you enjoy it upon the earth, because you have broken your promise. You shall be banished from this glorious land where I shall hide it, but always and forever you shall long for it and seek it. That shall be your punishment."

Then a beautiful young fairy in a dress made of silver and sunshine, sparkling like dew on the roses, ran forward and threw herself at the fairy King's feet.

"Oh, Your Majesty," she implored, "be not too hasty in your dreadful decision. The people of the earth are ignorant of the great value and blessing of this jewel. True, they have been ungrateful, but do not on that account condemn them forever to lose it. No matter how severe your sentence may be, let them at least have the hope of redeeming the jewel some day."

The King looked down tenderly upon the fairy, for she was his own daughter and favorite child, and gradually the frown disappeared from his forehead.

"You are soon to be married, my child," he said. "I will give you this precious gem as a wedding present, and you may, if you choose, finally restore it to the ungrateful mortals who have so carelessly lost it. But I make one condition in trusting it to you: you shall not give it to them or let them redeem it for a thousand years! That length of time shall they suffer. In this beautiful spot upon the earth you may live with your husband and ten thousand fairies, and carefully guard your treasure. For should this priceless jewel be taken from you, or you in your tenderness of heart give it back to the mortals before the thousand years shall have expired, I condemn you, with your husband and your followers, to dissolve and fade away into moonshine and mist."

So saying, the King lifted his daughter to his heart and tenderly embraced her. Soon afterwards the little princess was married to the handsomest prince in the fairy realm, and with her faithful followers she took charge of the wonderful jewel.

But the earth King with his Queen and all their subjects had been banished, and had gone weeping out of the beautiful country they so loved. The fairy King ordered the fairies to fan the waters of the ocean with their wings, making them colder and colder, until finally they froze so hard that no mortal could ever cross them. Then they wove a most beautiful, wonderful, sparkling mass together, white and soft as thistle down, and called it snow, piling it in glistening heaps around their country. Lastly they spun a glittering curtain of gossamer web, brilliant as the sun, and hung it around their city, thus blinding any one who saw it except a fairy.

Thus wrapped in its spotless mantle of snow, Fairyland awaited any invasion of the mortals. Many years went by, and the people of the world were discontented and unhappy, for they were always regretting the lost jewel and the wonderful land where it lay hidden. The fairies, however, occasionally came and visited the innocent little earth children, and one night one of them whispered in a dream all about the beautiful jewel.

Little Sten, the boy to whom she told it, was very young, but that wonderful dream he never forgot. He thought of the jewel and the wondrous land through all his childhood, and through all his youth he planned to seek and discover it. When grown to manhood his eloquence persuaded others to believe he could reach it, and they determined to help him to find it.

A ship was built, small and strong, and of the best possible material. Twelve sturdy men were chosen to accompany him, and the boat was provided with food to last for five years. For it would be a long journey, they well knew, and Sten had determined he would not return until he had discovered the land and found the beautiful jewel.

The handsome ship sailed merrily away through the northern seas, on toward the unknown land. For days and weeks it sailed, drifting with the ice currents and carefully steering at night in the direction of the bright little star in the north, hanging like a lantern over the treasure house. Big icebergs drifted by, and often nearly crushed the ship; and it was getting colder and colder.

They saw seals, and great walruses with long ivory tusks. The walruses pressed and huddled together in such masses that sometimes the sailors thought they were solid islands, and when the boat came near them they would throw themselves into the ocean, with loud bellows and roars, splashing the water tremendously.

Strange birds flew past, and some white sea gulls settled down ,upon the ship, making their mournful cries and seeming to warn the sailors to turn back before they were lost in these cold desolate regions. The sailors listened, and thought of their warm fires and comfortable homes, and begged their captain to return. Reindeer trotted by and stopped sometimes on the shore to watch. Polar bears in their long white coats climbed clumsily over the ice to look with astonishment at the strangers, but the mother bears were uneasy and timid, and made haste to find their little babies and hide them in ice holes, where just their baby heads peeped out, showing their bright, shining eyes.

Presently the northern lights shot up in millions of glittering rays, until the whole heavens seemed to tremble with their glory. Everything was very strange, and the men again begged their captain to return home, but he would not listen to their prayers. Finally, after weeks and months upon the waters, they saw gleaming in the distance the dazzling snow-peaks of fairyland, and over the tops of the white mountains a shining curtain of light. But the ice was everywhere, and at last the ship could not move an inch farther. She was fast in the ice, and it seemed that she must be crushed. There was no life anywhere, except on board the ship, for even the polar bears were not so far north. The captain now began to wish he had turned back when he could.

But the fairies took pity on the foolish sailors, and one night while the men slept they carried the ship for miles across the ice fields and placed it in the open sea, and when the sailors awoke they found their boat pointed homeward and lying on the calm blue waters of the ocean.

So Sten and his expedition failed to reach the Northern Land; but the next year another started, only again to meet with defeat, for though the fairies' battles are not fought like ours, no mortal can overcome these sprites. Nearly every year the world sends out a ship to seek that wondrous land in the far north where the priceless jewel lies hidden; but none ever succeed, for men are blinded with the snow and driven back by the ice barriers, which are the weapons used by the fairies.

Some day soon, for a thousand years is but a day in fairyland, when mortals least expect it, the tender-hearted fairy Princess in robes of shining light, with her husband and their whole court, will pull down those barriers of ice and snow. The ice will float away, and the snow will melt, and the beautiful Princess will come forth from her wondrous land with the precious jewel, and with generous hands will give it again into the keeping of the world. Then at last the brilliant jewel will really belong to the people of the earth, and the glorious land wherein it lies will again be opened to the world, yielding its rich beauties to mortal eyes forever.

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THE FOREST OF RAINBOW COLORS

ONE day a long time ago, the Sun-God was sending down upon the earth a bright stream of golden beams, which fell in a flood of glory over a great forest. The light and heat thus given by the sun was being taken up by the leaves and bodies of the trees, for it was this which gave them their strength and enabled them to grow so high. Big, towering trees they were, and their long, green branches stretched out in every direction, waving cool shadows which danced along the ground.

The forest covered many, many miles, and the giant trees, rearing their heads proudly at the thought of their wide possessions, nodded a friendly good-morning to the glittering sun.

Now the great Sun-God, moving slowly across the heavens each day, had grown so used to rising in the east and setting in the west every twenty-four hours that he did his duty without paying much attention to the world under him. But somehow, on the day I speak of, the trees looked unusually fresh and green, the cool shade beneath them was more attractive than it had ever seemed before, and for the first time the Sun-God realized in what a burning furnace he lived, —nothing but fire and flame and dreadful heat everywhere.

So on this particular day, the Sun-God looked across the thousands of miles of his great world and said to himself, "Dear me, how I should love to plant such a nice green forest as that down there in some corner of my kingdom. I wonder if any of those great trees would grow up here. At any rate, I think it is worth trying the experiment."

He called up his favorite son, and told him to go down to the earth, and make a study of the great forest to see if its trees could be transplanted with safety to the sun. Prince Rigel, though very much surprised, obeyed his father's command at once, and, assuming the form of a handsome young man, descended to the earth. In reality, of course, he still remained, a god, and as a proof of his royal ancestry his father filled a tiny golden ball with the precious fire from the sun and hung it around his neck. This sacred fire was a charm to preserve him till his return, and it was not to be opened, lest disaster should follow. Then the Sun-King gave him one hundred knights as attendants, and a bag of gold, so that he might make a dignified and rich appearance upon the earth; and promising to obey all his father's injunctions, Prince Rigel with his train floated down upon a white cloud and reached the top of a lofty mountain of the earth. From there it was easy to walk down into the valley, and at the foot of the mountain they found splendid black horses richly saddled awaiting them. They mounted at once, and riding forth on their adventure, certainly were a gallant-looking company.

Prince Rigel was a tall and strongly built young man. He had clear blue eyes and a blond beard and fair hair. ' His clothes were richly embroidered, while his armor and breast-plate were of pure gold. All his knights were handsomely dressed and wore breast-plates of silver, and when the sun shone upon them they were a dazzling sight to see.

Now the Prince had not ridden far when he saw a crowd of people ahead of him hurrying on toward a distant city. On inquiring their destination he was told they were going to attend a grand tournament, where the bravest and most successful knight was to wed the beautiful Princess Gwendolyn. The Princess Gwendolyn was the only daughter of the King, and was the loveliest maiden the sun ever shone upon. Rigel and his followers decided they would ride into the city and see the lady who was so beautiful, and also watch the tournament, where they were told any might enter the lists provided he was a gentleman and a brave knight. They found the tournament was to take place on a large open field near the King's palace. A low balcony had been built for the Princess Gwendolyn and her ladies-in-waiting, so arranged that when a suitor entered the lists he could ride up to the Princess and salute her. As each knight bowed very low before her, the Princess would take a ribbon from one of the ladies-in-waiting and, leaning over, pin her colors on his breast. Then the knight would ride slowly away to fight for the hand of the beautiful maiden.

Prince Rigel sat upon his prancing black charger listening to the music and watching the many suitors approach the Princess. He could see that she was really very beautiful; indeed, he thought he had never seen anything more lovely. She wore a white gown embroidered in delicate pearls, and over it a long court train of pale sea-green velvet. The train was worked in fine threads of silver, and hung in handsome folds behind her. Upon her head was a crown of pink roses, and her fair golden hair fell in waving masses almost to her knees.

She looked very young, the Prince thought, and he wondered if she would look as pretty if he were nearer. Before he realized just what he was doing he had ridden quite close and had stopped before the balcony. Then he saw that her skin was like lilies and roses mixed together, and that her eyes were very blue. The Princess took a ribbon, as she had done for many others, and, turning, looked full upon him for the first time. As her glance met his, there was so much admiration in his eyes that she blushed deeply; but somehow his gaze did not offend her and she thought to herself that he was certainly the handsomest young man she had ever seen. She took a rose from her hair and, leaning forward, pinned it with the ribbon upon his breast. His eyes spoke love though his lips said never a word, and when she had decorated him with her rose and her colors, he stooped and kissed the hand she extended to him, and rode forward to join the other suitors.

The tournament came to an end at last. Princess Gwendolyn's dainty white hand was fought for long and hard; but one by one the suitors were unhorsed, until finally Prince Rigel stood alone, victorious! To him belonged the most beautiful Princess in the world. Had he done right in winning her without telling her his secret? He hardly knew; but of one thing he was perfectly sure, and that was that he loved the beautiful Gwendolyn with his whole heart. Approaching her, he bent his knee and asked if he might speak with her for a moment alone. She drew apart from her handmaidens and granted his request.

"Ah, charming and adorable Princess," he began, "I love you more than my life, and if you consent to marry me I shall be the happiest and proudest man in the world. But before you consent to give me your hand, I have a confession to make. Though I am a Prince of high and royal blood, and therefore your equal in marriage, I cannot reveal to you the secret of my birth; and you must promise in accepting me never to open the tiny golden ball I wear about my neck."

So saying, he drew forth the lovely trinket at his throat and showed it to her.

"Grave dangers might arise should you seek the knowledge I must withhold," he continued; "but promising this, O beautiful Princess, you will not regret, I am sure, your marriage with me."

The Princess Gwendolyn looked long into the clear and honest eyes of her lover while he was speaking, and what she saw there must have satisfied her, for she gave him her hand, saying, "I will promise all you wish."

Then Prince Rigel joyfully took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

Shortly afterwards they were married, and the people said they had never seen a handsomer couple. The Prince was well provided with gold and silver, and he built his wife a magnificent palace and furnished it in the richest manner. The palace was on the crest of a hill and commanded a splendid view of the country and valleys for many miles around. Far off in the shimmering distance they could see the great forest the Sun-God had sent his son to the earth to study, and alas! it was just this fine forest that brought about Princess Gwendolyn's discontent.

Prince Rigel was as devoted as a husband could be, and as he was noble and good the Princess felt herself to be a very happy woman indeed. She shared in all his pleasures and pursuits save one, but with all his unselfish devotion and tender love of her he never once invited her to join in that. This was when he went riding in the forest. There he seemed to want no one save his one hundred knights with him; frequently she and her ladies would accompany him and his gay cavalcade to the borders of the wood, but there the Prince would kiss her a tender good-bye and bid her occupy herself with her embroidery at the palace until his return.

Now the Princess fretted a good deal over this one thing, and she wondered why, loving her as he did, he never seemed to desire her companionship in the forest. What did he do in those mysterious depths He did not hunt, for she always joined him in that sport, and it was surely not for the mere pleasure of riding he went there. What could the attraction be? It certainly was most strange.

One day as she was returning from the edge of the green woods, she saw the Witch of the Mountain appear suddenly in her path. The old woman's home on the mountain-side was called the Hill of the Wind, for the wind blew and moaned pitifully about it. It was built on a high, narrow wall of rock, and jutted out over an abyss, leaving just the narrowest path to walk on, and even if the Witch had been agreeable she would not have had many callers in such a place. But no one ever went to see her.

Now, Gwendolyn was not glad to meet her, for where-ever the mountain witch went she made mischief, and so the Princess tried to pass her with a simple "Good-morning." But the Witch was smiling a mocking smile, and stopped her saying, "Why worry your heart out, my pretty lady, about a man who loves his secret better than his wife?"

"What do you mean?" asked the Princess indignantly.

"All day while you pine and fret," replied the old Witch, "he carries out his plans, nor does he think of you a single moment."

The poor Princess looked very unhappy at these words, but she would not allow the horrid old woman to speak ill of her husband, so she answered, "I do not believe a word you say."

"Well," croaked the Witch, "if you have his confidence and love, do you know what he conceals in the golden ball? That secret keeps him from your side. Bring that bauble to me and I will read its mystery for you, and he will never again go into the forest without taking you.

"The ball he wears about his neck
Seems but a tiny golden speck,
Yet hidden within that little charm
Lies power enough for deadly harm."

So sang the old Witch, but the Princess, stopping her ears, called her maidens and fled from the evil woman's temptations.

That evening, however, when her husband returned, smiling and happy to be again with his beloved wife, he found her pale and downcast. To all his questions she gave evasive replies, and he saw that she was greatly disturbed. He tried in every way to find out what worried her, but without success.

Days and weeks went by, and the suspicions the old witch had aroused seemed to grow and magnify in Gwendolyn's mind. Every time her husband went to the forest she would shut herself in the palace and ponder over the golden charm he carried, and every night when he was lying asleep by her side she would watch it gleam and sparkle on his throat. Sometimes she would hold in her hand the small key that unlocked the chain and allowed the precious ball to slip off, but each time she would turn away terrified at what she was about to do in breaking her promise to her husband.

THE Princess fled from the evil woman's temptations.

Time slipped by, and the Prince, occupied with the study of the growth of the trees, and having such confidence in his wife's love and devotion, failed to notice how troubled she was. At last the night came when Gwendolyn could no longer resist; she felt if she could just keep the charm long enough to let the Witch read its secret to her, she could restore it to the Prince, who might never even miss it. She meant no harm, but it was a wicked thing to do, for in yielding to a dreadful curiosity she broke her word honorably given.

So she took the ball very easily from the chain without awakening her husband; she ran quickly down to the courtyard and sprang upon her fleetest horse, and holding the precious talisman she rode fast to the home of the Witch of the Mountain! The night was black and the wind cut her soft cheeks like a whip, but she hardly felt it; she rode on and on until she came to the lonely house of the old Witch, who stood without the door expecting her.

"Quick, quick!" said the trembling wife as she reached the house. "Read the dreadful secret, and then let me return to my husband. I feel terribly guilty in taking the ball, but upon my bended knees I will beg his forgiveness for it."

"Weak and silly woman," sneered the Witch, "why are you sorry?"

But the Princess, pale and with flying hair, did not answer; she only begged in a low voice that the Witch would read the charm and let her hurry home.

The old Witch took the trinket and held it tightly for a moment in her hands as though weighing it; then suddenly she thrust a sharp-pointed needle through it. In an instant a tiny yellow flash leaped out and rolled down the mountain-side. It seemed only a few drops of pure gold, but a magic glow surrounded it, and the light flamed as it rolled. It happened so suddenly, and the precious liquid or flame rolled away so swiftly, like quicksilver, that neither of the frightened women was able to catch it as it slipped by them. It was growing bigger and bigger as it went down the mountain-side, and when it reached the woods below, it shot up in sudden splendor, a great mass of fire.

What was it? They had never seen anything like it before. Diamonds and rubies, sapphires and opals, all melted together might show such colors, but nothing else. In a few moments the flames were leaping up among the trees. Oh, how fast they burned! The sky overhead was all red with the reflection — the magnificent forest was on fire!

The Witch shrieked with delight at the awful damage she had done, but the terrified wife crouched on her knees in terror and remorse. Here it was Prince Rigel found her, but she hardly knew her husband. Rays of light seemed to flash from his eyes, and he looked as though he were surrounded with the same strange flames that raged below among the trees. But tenderly he raised his wife to his breast, and said, "Alas, my beloved! could you not trust me? See the fearful calamity your curiosity has brought about: the world will soon be utterly destroyed, and you have caused our eternal separation, for now I must return to my father in the Sun. This was my secret, Gwendolyn, and this magical fire, so necessary to my existence, is death to yours."

"Do not leave me alone, my husband," cried the unhappy wife, clinging to him. "I should die without you. Can you not save the world in anyway?"

"If you had loved me," he replied sadly, "I might have had the power."

"But I love you with all my heart," said the wretched woman, "and I would give my life to prove it."

"Would you give up your life upon the earth for me? Would you go to my father's palace in the Sun?"

Gladly she answered, "Only forgive me this dreadful thing and keep me with you always, for I cannot be happy without you, beloved husband."

At these words he clasped her in his arms and pointed over the hills to the Sun rising slowly out of the sea. The waters looked cold and steel-blue in the faint light just breaking, but the sky was all a delicate pink with the tender flush of early dawn. Calling his knights together Rigel gave them some strange orders, which they hastened to obey. Gwendolyn saw a great light dart out from the Sun and form in a mass over the forest. It looked like a bright cloud with pointed rays of silver. Faster and faster it came, spreading out over the entire forest until it completely covered it; then with a loud explosion like thunder it burst, and the woods were deluged with its splendor. Hundreds of miles of the forest had been burning, but in an instant the contents of the marvellous cloud extinguished the flames. It seemed to drench them as though with some powerful liquid, but always afterwards the brilliant Sun had some dark spots on its surface, showing just where the precious liquid had been taken.

The forest had been turned to stone. All the wood had become agate, and now contained beautiful masses of fine crystals like purple amethysts, or yellow topazes, with fire rubies and emeralds mingled. It was as though every shade of the wonderful flames had been caught and preserved in the stone. It was an enchanted spot, and the Sun pouring down made it shine like a thousand rainbows. The old Witch, as a punishment for her wicked deed, was changed into a mountain of black stone and placed in the middle of a salt lake, where she was doomed to watch the petrified forest forever.

Thus it was that the Sun-God saved the world from being destroyed by fire. In spite of all his efforts, however, some of the Sun fire sank deep into the earth and hid under the mountains. Those mountains are to-day called volcanoes, and sometimes powerful flames break from them and shoot up with such fury that the earth trembles, and we call it an earthquake.

When the fire was out the Prince turned to his wife, who was weeping by his side, and in spite of all she had done his heart was tender toward her, for her sorrow was so great he could feel no anger.

"Beloved," he whispered, "come with me."

Then she felt herself drawn gently to him, and lifted in his arms, and she knew they were floating upwards higher and higher. When at last they reached the Sun, Rigel pleaded earnestly with his father, not only to forgive his beautiful wife her foolish curiosity, but also to make the world forget it and forgive her.

Moved by Rigel's prayers the Sun King placed Gwendolyn in the star-studded sky and called her the Moon. And there she shines in glorious splendor, flooding the world with light, and making the night even more beautiful than the day. That she is a good and tender wife again and has earned her forgiveness, we all know, for all the wealth of light she showers on the earth is given her by the Sun; without his loving, tender glances she would not shine at all. So if he were angry for a single minute, and turned his face away from her, she could not give us any light, but would be dark and gloomy. This proves, therefore, that the Sun God and his wife are contented, and so long as the moon continues to shed her splendid silver beams upon the earth, you can feel sure that Rigel and Gwendolyn are still perfectly happy.

THE LOST CITY OF THE SEA

MANY years ago, in a beautiful kingdom bordering on the ocean, there dwelt a handsome young Prince who devoted all of his time to study. He cared nothing for the amusements and pleasures of the court, and found his recreation in watching the waters and the skies. It distressed his father greatly that his only son never joined the youths and maidens at their sports, and he despaired of ever getting him interested in the affairs at court. Every one called him a dreamer, because he spent his time in day-dreams.

But one night the Prince did have a wonderful dream. It seemed to him he was transported to a mighty empire which ruled over a great continent. Rich and magnificent palaces filled the cities, and beautiful women came to greet him. The city he entered was a city of wonders, and its streets were paved with gold and silver. He had never seen anything more gorgeous. Suddenly, in the midst of its magnificence, a terrible catastrophe befell it, and under some awful spell it sank, with all its wealth and splendor, into the depths of the sea. It seemed that the spell would never be removed until a Prince of the earth should seek to discover the Lost City and consent to reign over it as King, when the city might rise again, with all its treasures, and take its place upon the earth.

THE whole court waited, in amusement, the promised sign.

Night after night Prince Nizir dreamed this strange dream, and each time a beautiful young Queen appeared, dressed in shining robes, with long, golden hair, and eyes as blue as forget-me-nots, and begged him to find the city and marry her, and thus become its King and re- store her and her subjects to a happy life again upon the earth.

He was much impressed with the dream and sought his father, begging permission to search for the Lost City and release the charming Queen and her people from the spell. His father at first refused, for he did not believe in dreams; and anyway, if a city had really been swallowed up by the sea, it was certainly foolish to look for it. However, being an indulgent father, he said:

"If you can show me any proof of any kind that such a city ever existed, I will consent to your undertaking to find it."

That night, therefore, when the golden-haired Queen appeared again the Prince told her what his father had said, and begged her for some sign.

"Very well," replied the Queen, "go to the water's edge to-morrow near mid-day, and in the sky you shall have a sign."

The next day at the appointed hour the whole court gathered and waited, in amusement, the promised sign in the skies, for none of them had any faith in the Prince's dream. But the young Prince never doubted the beautiful Queen's promise, and presently his faith was rewarded, for suddenly, like a perfect picture cast upon the heavens, they saw a marvellous sight. Far away over the level of the sea beautiful clouds were taking shape, and soon the reflection of the Lost City was thrown upon the sky. The streets were all of gold and silver, the palaces and domes were shining with jewels and gorgeous colors. Nothing was ever seen more beautiful, and the court remained watching it in surprise and delight until it gradually melted and faded away, and vanished like a dream.

The Prince was greatly rejoiced, for after this wonderful sign his father must keep his promise to let him go in search of the Lost City. The King made one condition, however, and that was that if he did not succeed in finding the city he must return to his home and forget the dream, and take more interest in the affairs at court. The Prince promised faithful obedience to his father's wishes, and shortly afterwards departed on his travels.

He first sought a learned man in the East, famous for his wise advice, and asked him what he should do to find the buried city. The wizard, who had known the story for many years, advised him to give up the adventure, saying the city had been buried so long he believed it could never be found. But the young man was not to be discouraged and was even more determined than before to undertake the journey, and he started on his search without further words. He sailed out on the first big ship he could get, spending months upon the waters, crossing and re-crossing all the large seas in the world. In his own heart he felt sure that some day he would find the buried city with the charming Queen Cleito and all the rich treasures it contained, and he knew that until he succeeded he could never be happy.

The waters of the ocean were so deeply blue he could not see down into them to any great depth, but he kept his eyes fastened on the water, and constantly hoped to catch a glimpse of the tops of the jewelled towers he had once seen in the sky.

After a long time, when he had journeyed across nearly every ocean in the world, he was caught in a terrible storm and shipwrecked. News reached his father that the vessel on which his son had sailed was lost, and with it every one on board. The old King mourned bitterly, for he blamed himself for letting his son go on such a foolish trip; and shortly after he died of grief.

Prince Nizir, however, was not drowned, but had managed to climb into a life-boat with several of his companions, and found himself adrift on the wide ocean. Days of suffering from thirst and starvation followed, but through it all the young Prince never once forgot his mission, and kept his eyes always fixed on the stormy depths of the waters, hoping and praying for a glimpse of the Lost City beneath.

One day, exhausted and faint with hunger and thirst, he was bending over the side of the boat, when he felt it suddenly drawn down into the water by unseen hands. Slowly it sank into the cool, green depths; lower and lower it went, and after the burning, parching thirst he had endured, the water was more deliciously refreshing than anything he had ever experienced before. Presently he opened his eyes and looked about him. Exquisite blue starfish floated near him, and white ones with rosy-tinted veins; sea-urchins and sea-cucumbers floated by, and strange and wonderful creatures of all kinds. Far off, hanging from the slippery rocks, he saw what looked like white leaves, but when he came nearer he found they were delicate little sponges. A group of larger ones, soft and beautiful, clung to the reefs.

Suddenly the boat stopped before a great gate of red coral. The Prince stepped out and fastened the boat, and walking up to the gate tried to unlock it. It swung slowly open before him, and he found himself in the streets of a beautiful city. His heart beat madly and his blood rushed through his veins, for this at last must be the city of his dreams.

He looked about him and saw that high mountains surrounded the place and seemed to shut out and hold back the water, for behind the mountains he could hear the waves rushing with a thundering noise against the sides, and see them dashing 'over the rocks in sparkling clouds of beautiful spray. The city had streets of pure gold and silver, and in marble basins along their sides was water flowing in crystal streams. These streams threw out a wonderful glow like phosphorus, and running as they did in all directions, they lit up the city magnificently day and night. They were spanned by bridges of pure gold.

Down the wide streets he saw palaces shining green and clear, with their tall towers rising high and pointed. One palace was of polished green marble, with doors cut out of solid crystal, and another was of pure amber, yellow and clear, with windows of rock crystal. But the handsomest of all the buildings was one with a great round dome. It was of the purest mother-of-pearl, and its delicate tints blended and melted together into constantly changing shades. In some lights it glistened white as snow, in others it took on a soft rosy pink. The doors of this palace were cut out of the rarest opals.

Surrounding the mother-of-pearl palace was a garden filled with wonderful shrubberies, and in the courtyard leading up to it were living whales spouting out water. Magnificent shells half as tall as himself bordered the path on either side, and these beautiful sea-shells were all lined with the daintiest pink you ever saw. He advanced towards the palace and finally entered one of the opal doors, which swung back before him as silently as the coral gates had done.

The Prince found himself in a vaulted room brilliantly lighted and handsomely furnished. Several doors led out of it, and he approached one and knocked. In a moment it was opened by an old man with a long white beard and flowing white garments, who held in his hands a bunch of keys. As he unlocked and opened the door the young Prince heard joyous strains of music. Two beautiful dancing-girls, richly dressed, came gliding into the room, and knelt and kissed his feet, crying, —

"We are your slaves, — command us, O mighty Prince, and we will obey you."

Prince Nizir, though very much startled at their appearance, said, "Lead me to Queen Cleito," for he felt sure that the Queen must be in the palace.

The dancing-girls, bidding him follow, led the way in graceful steps across a large hall into the throne room. This room was in the centre of the palace, and was under the dome he had noticed before. All of the ceiling and walls were of frosted silver inlaid with sparkling gems, and ornamented with the largest pearls he had ever seen. In the centre of the room, which shone all white and silver, on a magnificent throne of massive gold sat the Lady of his dreams. She was dressed in a pale blue gown embroidered in exquisite sea flowers of delicate tints. A long trail of soft blue velvet fell from her shoulders, and in her hand she held a golden sceptre. A necklace of diamonds encircled her throat, and on her head was a crown with twelve points, and upon each point glittered a sparkling diamond. The stones were so large and bright that their rays lit up the entire room, and made it as bright as day.

Queen Cleito rose to meet the Prince and give him welcome, and in soft tones she bade him sit beside her on her throne.

"I have long expected you," she said in a tender voice, "and I almost despaired of your coming, but you are brave and courageous and have found me at last."

Then the Prince, who had never seen anything so beautiful as the young Queen, fell madly in love with her on the spot, and sinking on his knees begged her to marry him at once. But she only smiled in response to his eagerness, for, she said, a queen could not marry in such unseemly haste. Proper dignity was the rule of royalty, and a week's festivity at least must announce their marriage.

Nizir was obliged to be content with this answer, and preparations began at once for the wedding, and the town crier went through the city announcing the great event. Early the next morning, when the Prince awakened, he found by his bed a brilliant red velvet suit; his attendants all came into the room dressed in scarlet, and even the light filtering through the windows was of the same gay color. The Queen met him clad in some soft silken dress of this shade, and wearing pigeon-blood rubies in her hair. He could not understand the reason for this until she told him that this was an old custom in her family, to wear certain shades of color each day before the marriage ceremony.

The Queen took him to the top of a tower and showed him her vast possessions. The glittering city in its crimson dress stretched out before them. Broad fields and meadows rolled beneath, and great giant forests lifted their waving branches. Across the meadows they caught glimpses of flowers standing in bright clusters of blues, ^and reds, and yellows, and hosts of tiny white ones, star-shaped, were bursting up through the brilliant masses. Now and then the phosphorescent water, with its rosy color, peeped between the spaces of the mountains, or a pretty mermaid floated by in one of the marble basins in the street, holding her lute in her hand and singing entrancing melodies, or raising a beautiful arm and beckoning to some one in the Lost City to join her. But woe to him if he consented, for he never returned.

Beneath them, Prince Nizir saw enormous factories, filled with busy people, and presently he saw a building that glittered and sparkled like freshly fallen snow. He asked in wonderment what it could be.

"That contains one of our greatest industries," the Queen replied. "That building is of pure salt, and from it we supply all the salt used in the upper world. I had not long been under the sea," she continued, "when I determined to give employment to my people by this industry. It was an easy thing to take the salt from the water, but how to supply the people on the earth was not so easy to determine. We had not the right to go upon the earth, but I soon learned we might work under it, so we tunnelled the whole world. After doing this it was an easy thing to plant salt mines everywhere, and this we have done, so that to-day every portion of the globe is supplied with salt made in the building you now see."

Nizir, looking closely, saw hundreds of sparkling forms flitting through the factory, their clothes powdered with the beautiful diamond dust they called salt, and whenever they moved they flashed forth brilliant light. These people were kept busy night and day supplying the world's demand for salt, and keeping the salt mines filled.

On the second morning, when the Prince awoke, every body was clothed in a bright green, and the lovely Queen appeared wearing a green silk dress with an emerald necklace. The third day her dress was pale blue, with flashing diamonds and turquoises for ornaments. On the fourth day she wore a dress of deep yellow, made of spun gold, and her ornaments were topazes. The palace shone like a sunflower. The yellow light flooded the city and gilded the palaces until they seemed of pure gold.

Each day Prince Nizir saw more wonders in this marvellous city. Such jewels and wealth he had never imagined. The rarest pearls were brought to the palace every day, for the oysters selected their finest and best to offer, and the Queen had thousands upon thousands stored in huge chests. All the treasures of the sea were brought to the Queen that she might choose from them. The whales and dolphins and the big fish scoured the ocean each day for its wonders, and at the weekly audiences Queen Cleito held, they offered their gifts. It was impossible to estimate her wealth, and whole palaces were filled with her gems.

On the fifth morning the city was colored in a deep blue light, for the strange custom of colors lasted seven days, and the Queen wore with her blue gown handsome sapphires. The light on the sixth day was a delicate pink, just the shade the clouds take on at sunrise before they burst into the glory of the day. The city was all bathed in a rosy color, and the Queen's dress was of satin of the same rich shade. With it she wore pink coral ornaments and a fine pink pearl in a ring.

On the seventh day, which was the wedding morning, everything was white and silver. Flashing crystal lights bathed the palace, and the ladies wore soft white dresses with silver ornaments and pearls. The bride herself was in shimmering white silk and lace, and wore moonstones and diamonds. Her long train was carried by two little pages in velvet suits and her bridesmaids were twelve beautiful maidens. They carried enormous fans of white ostrich feathers, with handles of amber inlaid with rare and precious jewels.

The wedding was celebrated with great pomp, and the festivities continued through many days. Then followed months of happiness for the bridal pair, for the Prince loved the beautiful Cleito, and he felt as though he would be perfectly satisfied to spend the rest of his life under the waves. But several times his conscience smote him that he had so long forgotten his poor old father, who must be grieving for him as dead.

After awhile he begged his Queen to leave her people a short time and accompany him on a visit to his own home. They need not stay long, he argued, and could soon return to the Sea City. Now his wife loved him very dearly, so he had not much difficulty in persuading her to do as he wished. She told him, however, that during her stay upon the earth she must keep absolute silence. She would not be allowed to speak a single word, but must remain dumb. Only upon this condition could she accompany him before the time allotted for his reign should expire.

Prince Nizir agreed to the condition and said it would be an easy matter to explain her silence to his father. Their subjects consented reluctantly to their departure, and very soon afterwards they started on their journey. They found the Prince's boat where he had left it fastened to the. coral reef, and soon after getting into it they rose on the top of a wave and floated on the broad blue waters of the ocean, and not many hours later Prince Nizir pointed out to Cleito the tall towers of his father's palaces.

His subjects, who had mourned him as dead, came running out to meet him, and soon the shore was lined with wondering people. He greeted them joyfully, but they were terrified and frightened at his appearance. He looked as white as the foam dashing over his boat, and he talked wildly of a buried city lost in the sea which he had found. He spoke of its treasures and magnificent wealth, and of being its King. By his side sat a beautiful creature, but she was as colorless as he, and her long golden hair floated about her in tangled masses entwined with coral and sea-weed. The Prince proudly presented her as his Queen, and made them kneel and kiss her hand, but she did not speak a word, and looked about her sadly and anxiously. Nizir called her Cleito, and said she was the Queen of the Lost City. Then the people whispered he must be mad, and that the Sun had turned his brain.

Now that his father was dead Nizir was proclaimed King at once, and then he was publicly married to his beautiful Queen so that they might be crowned together in becoming pomp and splendor. But the lovely Queen seemed unhappy. Her maids often surprised her in tears, and she watched the gay life about her with a sad face. She grew whiter each day and sat by the open window, always watching the sea. She never spoke a word and rarely smiled, and then only for the King.

Now King Nizir was madly in love with his Queen and spent as much time with her as he could take from the cares of state, but all of his tenderness did not make her happy, for her listless and indifferent manner never changed. Only when he would sit beside her talking of her beautiful home, and telling her how he was arranging to return to that wonderful kingdom beneath the sparkling waters, would she show any interest.

The gossips at court whispered that the Queen was one of the shipwrecked people and the daughter of a great sultan; that she had disobeyed her father's command in running away with her lover, and that when her lover was drowned she did not care to live without him. It was said that she and the King alone were saved from the sinking vessel in that awful storm, and that the King went mad from hunger and thirst, and imagined everything about the Lost City and his life there with the beautiful Cleito, and that he had mistaken the daughter of the sultan for his bride of the ocean. Thus the court gossips talked, but the Queen never broke her silence.

One day, radiant and smiling, the King came to his wife and asked her if she would like to return that day to her beautiful home in the sea. She was startled at his question and a little frightened, but she nodded an eager assent, and when the ship came entered it with a smile. She had dressed herself as a bride for a wedding, all in white, with a veil upon her head and lilies in her hair. Then she and the King sailed merrily away in the early morning mists to find their beloved city.

They never returned to their earthly kingdom. Their subjects offered large rewards for finding the boat with the mad King and his beautiful Queen, and the seas were searched for many months, but without success. Sometimes a white-sailed vessel was sighted and chased, but when caught it was never the King's ship. With the passing of the days people noticed strange and mysterious things. Often the wind swept by groaning and shrieking in agony, and often the mariners Bailing in their stanch little crafts were startled by seeing close to their boat a phantom ship. As soon as they turned their lights upon it and gave chase it would disappear.

And sometimes to this day, in a big storm, or again on a quiet night, sailors see a white sail slip close by them, with two figures on the deck, a man and a woman, and the woman is dressed in bridal robes and is very beautiful. But when they hail the boat no answer comes, and if they try to approach it, it darts away and in a second vanishes. It is the phantom ship of Queen Cleito and Prince Nizir, skimming the ocean looking for their Lost City of the Sea.

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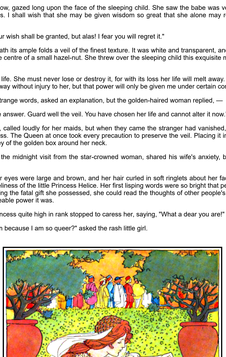
THE WHITE PALACE



THE child grew in beauty and wisdom.

IN a country of wonderful beauty, where the green fields sloped down to the water's edge and the trees waved their long, green branches under a smiling sky of sunshine, there once ruled a King and a Queen. The country was rich and prosperous and the people were thrifty and happy, and all would have been well had it not been for the Queen's ambition.

Now the Queen was young and handsome, but she was also haughty and proud, and in her selfish way she tried to make every one around her believe that what she had was the very finest and best in the world. Her palace, her lands, her clothes, her jewels, she urged with arrogant pride were better than any one's else in the whole wide world. But the King was so busy, that he hardly noticed this weakness of his wife's; and besides, he really was so devoted to her that he would probably have been the last to see it anyway.

The pleasures of this royal couple were many, but one drop of bitterness always mingled in them — they had no children. The Queen was constantly wishing for a child and hoped when it came that it would be the most beautiful and the most brilliant in the kingdom.

One day, after many years of waiting, their hearts' desire was granted in the birth of a little daughter. She was as dainty a little Princess as could be found, and lay like a pink rose-bud amid her white pillows. That night while the Queen was watching her little one, there appeared beside the baby's cradle a tall fair-haired woman. She wore a crown of seven stars upon her head, and a magnificent cloak, heavily embroidered in many colors, fell from her shoulders to her feet. One arm was outstretched, and in it she carried a wand.

"I preside over the cradle of the new-born," said the handsome woman to the Queen, "and I have the power to grant any wish you may make for your child. Choose well, for one alone can I give."

Then the Queen, lifting herself on her elbow, gazed long upon the face of the sleeping child. She saw the babe was very lovely, and she said to herself, "I need not ask for beauty, — that she already possesses. I shall wish that she may be given wisdom so great that she alone may read the unspoken thoughts of others, and be called the wisest in the land."

"Foolish mother," sighed the stranger, "your wish shall be granted, but alas! I fear you will regret it."

Raising her cloak, she brought from beneath its ample folds a veil of the finest texture. It was white and transparent, and so delicate in fabric that, though many yards in length, when folded it could be placed in the centre of a small hazel-nut. She threw over the sleeping child this exquisite material, completely enveloping it in its delicate folds, and as she did so said to the Queen, —

"Guard this veil as you would your child's life. She must never lose or destroy it, for with its loss her life will melt away. Therefore if you wish to keep her healthy and well, preserve it carefully. I alone can take it away without injury to her, but that power will only be given me under certain conditions."

The Queen, becoming alarmed at these strange words, asked an explanation, but the golden-haired woman replied, —

"Your daughter's life alone will develop the answer. Guard well the veil. You have chosen her life and cannot alter it now."

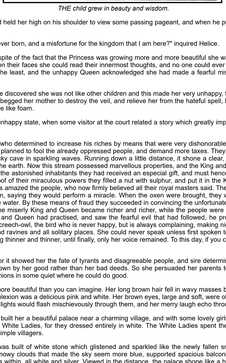
The poor mother, terrified at these words, called loudly for her maids, but when they came the stranger had vanished, leaving only the white veil, soft and fine as a spider's web, spread over the sleeping Princess. The Queen at once took every precaution to preserve the veil. Placing it in a tiny golden box, and sealing and locking it, she hid it in the Palace treasury, putting the key of the golden box around her neck.

The King, alarmed at first at the story of the midnight visit from the star-crowned woman, shared his wife's anxiety, but as time went by they gradually forgot their fears.

The child grew in beauty and wisdom; her eyes were large and brown, and her hair curled in soft ringlets about her face. Her cheeks were like peaches and cream, and every one marvelled at the wonderful loveliness of the little Princess Helice. Her first lisping words were so bright that people stopped to listen, but they did not remain long, for almost immediately she began showing the fatal gift she possessed, she could read the thoughts of other people's minds. Sometimes it was most embarrassing, and her parents soon realized what a disagreeable power it was.

Once, when Helice was a little older, a Princess quite high in rank stopped to caress her, saying, "What a dear you are!"

"Then why do you think I cannot be human because I am so queer?" asked the rash little girl.



THE child grew in beauty and wisdom.

Another time, a courtier picked her up and held her high on his shoulder to view some passing pageant, and when he put her down bowed low, saying, "I am honored to have held the King's daughter."

"Why, then, do you think it is a pity I was ever born, and a misfortune for the kingdom that I am here?" inquired Helice.

Every day such things happened, and in spite of the fact that the Princess was growing more and more beautiful she was more and more shunned. Every one feared her words. The minute her bright eyes had rested upon them she could read their innermost thoughts, and no one could ever keep a secret before the little Princess. It was a very uncomfortable state of affairs, to say the least, and the unhappy Queen acknowledged she had made a fearful mistake in wishing so much wisdom for her little daughter.

Helice at first did not mind it, but finally she discovered she was not like other children and this made her very unhappy, for she was a tender-hearted little girl, and she did not wish to hurt people's feelings. So she begged her mother to destroy the veil, and relieve her from the hateful spell, but this the Queen would not do, knowing well that if she did her daughter's life would dissolve like foam.

Time went by, and things were all in this unhappy state, when some visitor at the court related a story which greatly impressed the little Princess. It was called "A Just Punishment," and was as follows.

There once lived a great tyrant of a King who determined to increase his riches by means that were very dishonorable. His Queen, who was equally ambitious, was even more wicked than he, and together they planned to fool the already oppressed people, and demand more taxes. They had discovered a small stream of water in the depths of a large forest. It flowed out of a rocky cave in sparkling waves. Running down a little distance, it shone a clear, crystal light in the dark woods, then suddenly dwindling to a mere thread it disappeared in the earth. Now this stream possessed marvellous properties, and the King and Queen built themselves a magnificent temple near it, and when it was completed, they told the astonished inhabitants they had received an especial gift, and must henceforth be worshipped with divine honors. They then demanded gifts of gold and silver. In proof of their miraculous powers they filled a nut with sulphur, and put it in the King's mouth. By artfully conveying fire to it he breathed out flames whenever he wished. This amazed the people, who now firmly believed all their royal masters said. Then the King and Queen invited their subjects to bring all the black oxen in the country to them, saying they would perform a miracle. When the oxen were brought, they were bathed in the stream and came out pure white, owing to the wonderful properties in the water. By these means of fraud they succeeded in convincing the unfortunate people of all they said, and the poor subjects gave them whatever they asked. Gradually the miserly King and Queen became richer and richer, while the people were almost starving. When the King of the Fairies learned of the terrible fraud the wicked King and Queen had practised, and saw the fearful evil that had followed, he promptly came to the rescue of the unfortunate country. He changed the wicked King into a screech-owl, the bird who is never happy, but is always complaining, making night doleful with his moans and cries, while the Queen was condemned to haunt the rocks and ravines and all solitary places. She could never speak unless first spoken to, and then could only repeat what she heard. She pined away under this punishment, getting thinner and thinner, until finally, only her voice remained. To this day, if you call out suddenly in some lonely spot, her voice is heard in reply in the distant echo.

This story impressed Helice very much, for it showed her the fate of tyrants and disagreeable people, and she determined never to grow like them, but to control the unfortunate gift she possessed, and to be known by her good rather than her bad deeds. So she persuaded her parents to let her leave the Court, where she found no happiness, and live with a few chosen companions in some quiet where he could do good.

She was nearly grown by this time, and more beautiful than you can imagine. Her long brown hair fell in wavy masses below her waist, her small white teeth gleamed like pearls between her red lips, and her complexion was a delicious pink and white. Her brown eyes, large and soft, were often sad, remembering the unfortunate gift she possessed; yet at times forgetting, the golden lights would flash mischievously through them, and her merry laugh echo through the palace like soft music.

When she was almost sixteen, her father built her a beautiful palace near a charming village, and with some lovely girls of her own age for companions, she took up her abode there. They called themselves the White Ladies, for they dressed entirely in white. The White Ladies spent their time in doing good, — in teaching the little children, and improving the conditions of the simple villagers.

Their palace was on a sloping hill, and was built of white stone which glistened and sparkled like the newly fallen snow. Every detail about the building was very graceful. The slender columns, light as the snowy clouds that made the sky seem more blue, supported spacious balconies, and through the broad high windows one caught glimpses of the magnificent furnishings within, all white and silver. Viewed in the distance, the palace shone like a huge pearl lying on the green hillside. Even the guards stationed outside the grounds were dressed in white, and their spears were of polished steel and silver.

Every one soon learned to love the Princess and her White Ladies, and the fame of their good deeds spread far and wide. Each year the Princess herself became more dazzlingly beautiful, and in spite of the fact that she possessed the disagreeable gift of reading every one's thoughts, there were many young men who desired to ask her hand in marriage. Her parents wished her to consider the question seriously, but the Princess was happier in her White Palace, surrounded with her lovely companions, than she had ever been before, and she felt to enter the world again would only renew her troubles. Of course, she continued to read the thoughts of all about her, but they were good and loving friends, and she did not find it like meeting people in the world. So she begged her father to delay her marriage, and let her live with her White Ladies, and her villagers.

Her parents, however, loved her dearly, and were anxious to have her choose some one who would care for her at their death. At last, to gain time, she wrote out a riddle, and told her father she would marry any one who would guess it correctly. Many guesses were made and sultors came to the palace with their answers. The Princess saw them all, but she was not disturbed, for the instant she laid her eyes on them, she saw they had not guessed correctly. Gentle and kind she always was, but firm in her determination to keep her liberty.

One day, with a great blare of trumpets, the herald announced that a cavalcade without demanded audience. They evidently came from some powerful monarch, for enormous elephants and camels were laden with magnificent gifts for the Princess. They said they were sent by the King of Bengalia, to demand the Princess' hand in marriage, as he had successfully guessed her riddle.

The Princess smiled to herself when she heard the demand, but according to her promise she could refuse to see no one, so she bade them admit the King's ambassador. Her maidens dressed her in a gown of the whitest spun-silver, and coiling her brown hair high on her head, placed in it a lovely white rose. She was a vision of girlish beauty as she sat on her throne awaiting the message of the King.

When the messenger came into her presence he was announced as the Count Olenus, and she saw he was very handsome. He was a tall and slender youth, and seemed but a few years older than herself. His black hair waved a little on his head, and his deep grey eyes were large and beautiful. His clothes were made of the richest and finest texture, but he bore himself simply and modestly. But as he knelt at the Princess' feet and kissed her hand, the Princess turned deadly pale, for as she gave him her hand she realized that she could not read his mind. It was as a closed book to her.

The King of Bengalia's letter requested that the Princess would grant his dearest friend, and ambassador, the Count Olenus, her hospitality and friendship. He himself would follow in a month to claim her hand. As she read the letter the Princess regained her composure somewhat, and turning to the Count she said,

"Perhaps your King is over-confident of success."

"O beautiful Princess," began Olenus, in rich, low tones, "the King has surely won you fairly."

Then the Princess, who again felt her heart beat strangely, said, "Make haste to answer our riddle," and ordering her herald to come forward, he read the following:

"A man had twelve sons, and each of his sons had thirty white sons, and thirty black daughters. These sons and daughters died every day, yet they were immortal."

"The answer," replied the young Count, steadily watching the Princess' lovely face, "is this. The year has twelve months or sons. Each of these months has thirty white sons or days, and thirty black daughters or nights. They consequently die, yet they live always. Am I correct.i "

"Yes," murmured the Princess, pale as death, "that is the true answer."

"Then upon my bended knees, I demand the fulfilment of your promise for my friend and King." Saying this, Count Olenus advanced, and kneeling held out his hand. White and trembling, but with the dignity of a Princess, Helice laid her hand in his, and said in a low, soft voice, —

"I faithfully promise to marry the King of Bengalia, when he comes to claim me."

Then she abruptly dismissed her Court. That night, however, she was obliged to give the customary banquet to her guests, and at her right hand sat the King's ambassador, smiling and happy, and telling her many most charming and fascinating.

The King was to arrive in a month, and so preparations began at once for the wedding. But the Princess seemed very sad. The only thing that diverted her was when she planned hunting-parties and pleasures for her guests, for then the handsome Count Olenus accompanied her, and somehow the time always passed very pleasantly talking to him. But a great change had come over the young Princess, — she could no longer read the minds of any one about her.

This would have rejoiced her at any other time, but now she was too sad in the thought that every day brought her nearer her wedding, to care much about it, for she felt that she could not love the King of Bengalia.

Count Olenus frequently entertained them with stories, and the Princess would listen entranced, when he would tell her of how, far beyond the seas, beyond the great desert where the sand-storms rise and sweep across countless miles of waste, the fame of her great beauty had reached them, until they all longed to see her; and how, hearing of her marvellous loveliness, their King had determined to win her for his bride.

"Tell us of your country," said the Princess one night. "What is it like?"

"I will try to describe it," said the count softly, and he began.

"In the far East, as you know, lies the country of Bengalia. Its great cities and its beautiful villages are the pride of its people, and its fame for wealth is as wide-spread as its reputation for its magnificent mosques and temples. For since the first King of Bengalia ruled, wisely, and well, it has ever been famous.

"Once in the long ago — it sounds like a pretty romance — a charming little Princess was given a bit of country by her father, and put at the head of a nation. She was a winsome maiden, though rather young for such a responsible position, but she was as wise as she was beautiful, and governed her people well. She soon made her domain a charming spot; fields were cultivated, flowers were planted and grew up in fragrance and beauty, and, prosperous and happy, the country throve.

"A beautiful river ran like a silver line through the country, winding and turning until it emptied itself into the great sea many miles distant, and this river was beloved and watched by the people with pride, for never a drop of rain fell out of their clear, ever sunny skies. Beautiful and blue they shone always, and if occasionally a cloud floated across, it was never black, but pure as the snow.

"They loved the broad, rolling river, then, for two reasons, first, because its shining waters were beautiful to look upon; and second, because it supplied their needs, for twice every year its broad banks overflowed with the precious fluid, and the thrifty people rejoiced in the days which followed. Their beloved river was everything to them, and down to its silver and blue borders crept the green fields and yellow grain they cultivated. The sunshine continually smiled upon them, and there was no happier people in the world. But suddenly a horrible giant magician swept down upon them. He was as big as six men, and he was loud-voiced and wicked and cruel. He built a tower on the side of the mountain, and he sat up at the sheep and cattle, and finally ended by demanding the hand of the dainty little Princess in marriage.

"The people refused his demand and made war upon him, but he was so powerful he could crush whole armies at once, and so they determined to try some other means than fighting to rid themselves of him. They sent an army of bees to sting him to death in the night, but his skin was so thick that when the bees stung him he just turned over and said, Dear me, how annoying the mosquitoes are to-night,' and went right to sleep again. Then they sent a lion to eat him up, but when the lion saw how big he was, he became so frightened he could not even roar.

"Finally the Princess, who was as brave as she was beautiful, determined to face him herself, and at the head of a large army she advanced to meet him. But he just snatched her up when he saw her and put her in the high tower. Then he destroyed her lands, ruined her fields, and turned the country into a trackless desert, with nothing but scorching sands everywhere, and the unfortunate people were turned into hills of stone and left to whiten beneath the blazing sun.

"After he had put the country under this awful spell he sat himself down, determined to wait until the poor little Princess would consent to marry him. All day he left her locked in the tower while he looked for food, and at night after his long tramp he would return and climb to the top of the tower and demand of her in a loud voice if she was ready to marry him. But the Princess, miserable as she was, always answered, 'No, you are a cruel monster and have destroyed my faithful people and my country, and I shall never marry you, for I hate you.'

"The old giant would chuckle to himself, and leaving a jug of water and a loaf of bread outside her door would say, 'Very well, my pretty one, this is all you shall have to eat until you consent,' and would hobble down the steps again.

"So the poor little maiden sat there alone, and spent her days singing to keep up her courage, though you may be sure her songs, like her heart, were very sad. One day a handsome young Prince, who was hunting and had lost his way, stopped before the tower and heard her lovely voice. Amazed, he asked who she was, and in sad tones she told him her story.

"The young Prince determined to rescue her, and going to the forest he met a friendly giraffe who kindly . consented to assist him. The giraffe accompanied him to the tower, and then stretched out his long neck for the Prince to climb up on, and in this way the young man soon reached the tiny window through which came the Princess' voice. Looking in, the Prince saw the most beautiful face he had ever beheld, but he also saw that the window was barred with iron and that he could not open it.

"He did not despair, however, but telling the lovely maiden to keep up her courage, he went back to the forest. There he found a little animal with soft fur and very strong feet, called the mole, which always digs into the earth, and asking the little fellow to return with him, with its assistance he dug 'a big hole under the steps. This hole he lightly covered with dirt, and then sat down to wait for the old giant. Of course he hid himself well so as not to be seen. The giant came as usual that night, and walked up the steps to the tower and asked the Princess if she would marry him. Then the Prince cleared the dirt from the hole, and in a moment the steps gave way and the old giant tumbled down and was killed.

"With the death of the cruel giant the spell was broken. The Princess came down from her cell on the friendly giraffe's neck, and her people were restored to their natural forms. In gratitude for her deliverance the Princess married the handsome Prince, and once more the lovely country became prosperous and charming, the magnificent mosques and temples were rebuilt, and the country again became the pride of its people.

"But a portion of the magician's spell was never broken, and they did not seek to change it, for it proved their greatest protection from their enemies. On one side of the great city a trackless desert was left, so that no one could ever enter save over the sea, for the country is so large it stretches down to the broad waters of the ocean. Thus the land is always protected from its enemies, and no wicked spells can be woven there. The Princess and her brave husband called their domain Bengalia, and their descendants skill live there and cherish it, for there is no more beautiful spot in the world. All along the river rise famous temples with their minarets and richly carved towers, and under the brilliancy of their cloudless skies these temples and mosques glisten and flash like millions of jewels. There also you will see the narrow strip of green fields richly cultivated, crawling like a ribbon of green between the banks, and back of the green strip lies the desert with its yellow sands, while amid these sands rise the tawny hills, barren and stern, standing like sentinels guarding the great treasures of the country, — and to this lovely land, fair Princess, my King invites you!"

The story was finished and the Princess arose, almost in tears. She knew not why, but she was very sad. The next day the King would arrive and she must marry him. Was she unhappy because she was to go to the land of Bengalia Olenus had so beautifully described

The morning broke clear and brilliant. The King had arrived in the night, and his army of white tents lay beyond the city. The bride, colorless as a lily in her snowy clouds of lace and satin, stood silent amid her laughing maidens. She felt like a victim prepared for sacrifice, and her mournful eyes lingered on all her beloved and beautiful possessions in the White Palace. But she had given her pledge and she must fulfil her promise and marry the King.

At last the hour had come when she must go to meet him. Stately and dignified, she approached the throne-room where he awaited her. So sad was she that she could hardly raise her eyes to greet him when he advanced and took her hand. When she did gain her courage, however, to look up, she saw the King of Bengalia, smiling with love before her, was none other than the handsome Count Olenus!

The pale little Princess quickly became a blushing rose when the King whispered, "Forgive me my deception, beautiful Helice, but I determined to gain your heart as well as your hand, and this seemed the only way."

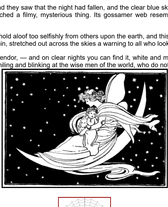
They were married immediately, and after the ceremony the King of Bengalia drew his charming bride away from the throng of merry-makers out into the quiet garden, sweet with roses and honeysuckle, and it seemed to them they were the happiest people in the world. The evening was strangely beautiful. The glitter of the day was passing and soft shadows were creeping up over the hills, but the sky was all a delicate rose pink. The King was telling his bride of the beautiful home he had prepared for her beyond the sea, and the life of happiness they would lead there together, when suddenly in their path appeared a tall, fair woman. Upon her head she wore a crown of seven stars. She was resplendent with beauty, and light seemed to radiate from her as she approached them. She addressed the bride, saying, —

"I have come for the magical veil I gave you. Your bridal veil of love has destroyed the spell of a selfish wish made at your birth. Henceforth you shall live in happiness."

So saying she pointed upward, and looking overhead they saw that the night had fallen, and the clear blue sky had already put on its jewelled robe, embroidered with its millions of flashing stars. Across the heavens stretched a filmy, mysterious thing. Its gossamer web resembled the fine weaving of a veil, and it shimmered and trembled in quivering waves of white.

"It is not well to read the future," she continued, "or hold aloof too selfishly from others upon the earth, and this is why too much wisdom often brings unhappiness with it. There lies your veil of knowledge, and so it shall remain, stretched out across the skies a warning to all who look.

And there to this day it still is — a Milky Way of splendor, — and on clear nights you can find it, white and mysterious, rolled out for miles across the heavens. In its transparent meshes dance millions of twinkling stars, smiling and blinking at the wise men of the world, who do not know how it got there.



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THE STAR FAIRIES

AND
OTHER FAIRY TALES

BY
EDITH OGDEN HARRISON

Author of
PRINCE SILVERWINGS

With Illustrations in
Color & Other Drawings
by
Lucy Fitch Perkins

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"NONE of my jewels are like the fairy's."

To the little Readers
of
PRINCE

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THE STAR FAIRIES
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THE LAND OF THE POLAR STAR
THE FOREST OF RAINBOW COLORS
THE LOST CITY OF THE SEA
THE WHITE PALACE

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"None of my jewels are like the fairy's"
She was called the loveliest Princess in the world
Nerida had never been lovelier than in her bridal robes
The Princess fled from the evil woman's temptations
The whole court waited, in amusement, the promised sign
The child grew in beauty and wisdom